

Abandoned in a storm

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June 18, 2012

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The “Jesus asleep in the boat during a terrible storm” story has always seemed unfair to me. I feel for the disciples when they wake him; they are understandably angry that he doesn’t seem to care that they are about to die. I’d be just as angry at Jesus for appearing so calm in the midst of real danger.

The disciples are uncomfortable that Jesus is not acting according to the category of “concerned friend,” much less “messiah”—so they kind of yell at him. And when it comes down to it, who hasn’t yelled at God during the storms of life? Who hasn’t said, “Don’t you care?”

Who hasn’t experienced death or isolation or chaos or anxiety or just simple raw human pain and not felt that God was by all appearances lazily sleeping through it? Surely if God cared about me, God would change my life circumstances to suit my preferences—or maybe God could have kept the tragic, painful thing from happening in the first place.

When we are fearful or angry we feel as though God has abandoned us, or at least fallen asleep on a comfy cushion. When storms arise and people die and we suffer and our friends abandon us, we assume God has fallen down on the job. Again.

When I was working as a student chaplain, I often visited people who tried pretty hard to convince me that even though their lives had just been eviscerated by tragedy and loss, they were not mad at God. But it’s no sin to hold God’s feet to the fire and ask, “Why have you abandoned me?” The Hebrew scriptures are filled with stories of folks doing just that, and there’s no better place to start than Job.

Job, the poor sod, loses everything—despite the fact that he's about the most upstanding, righteous dude around, like a combination of Ned Flanders and Bono. But his righteousness doesn't matter. His wife and children die; he goes bankrupt; his body is covered with boils; his friends blow him off. It's one of the most disturbing stories in the Bible.

This week offers us preachers a great opportunity to preach about where God is in the midst of storms and suffering. Your people might just be grateful that you've asked out loud what they are afraid to.